# Introduction
# Introducción

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I.

Saul Bellow's *The Bellarosa Connection* (1989) tells the story of Harry Fonstein, a Jewish refugee who, like other thousands of Jews, could escape Mussolini's Italy and arrive in the United States through an underground operation organized by the Broadway producer Billy Rose. Four decades later—and after several failed attempts to meet Rose—Harry's wife Sorella manages to arrange an encounter with Harry's benefactor to thank him in person. At one point of the conversation between Sorella and Billy Rose, the impresario says: "Remember, forget—what's the difference to me" (53). These words, uttered by someone who "emerges in this novella as the representative of American entrepreneurial showmanship, but also of American indifference" (Aarons 2017: 63), reflect a disdain for the past which inevitably leads to the effacement of collective memory.

Someone who embodies the diametrically opposing approach is Simon Markovitch Dubnow (Семен Маркович Дубнов / שמעון מרקוביץ' דובנאוו), a late 19th to mid-20th century Belorussian historian whose well-known phrase "Jews, write and record" – («און פרשרייבט ייִדן, שרייבט») – summarizes his 'mission' very well. Dubnow's words make a special impression when one learns that they were uttered when he was about to be executed after he had gone through a painful illness. He was later buried in a mass grave in the Rumbula forest.[1]

Dubnow's phrase "Jews, write and record," interpreted as his final urge to bear witness of what his fellow folks had suffered, has been at the heart of the testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors like those of Jean Améry, Aharon Appelfeld (אהרן אפלפלד), Edith Bruck, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal, among others.[2] Their

1 For further information, consult the entry "Simon Dubnow" by the Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team at http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/dubnow.html [30 May 2018].
2 See, for instance, Dawidowicz (1986 [1975]: 129-149) for an extended study of Nazi extermination camps such as Auschwitz, Bełżec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór and Treblinka; consult also Hilberg (1985 [1961]: 220-259) for a detailed analysis of killing center operations; and Friedländer (2007: 501-510) for an analysis of an extermination camp like Auschwitz II-Birkenau, as well as (314-318) for an account of other extermination sites such as Chełmno.



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contribution to what could be called a 'never forget mission' has been as invaluable as that of their non-Jewish fellow prisoners such as Charlotte Delbo,[3] David Rousset, Jorge Semprún and Ernst Wiechert, among others.

One of those survivors who virtually devoted all his post-Auschwitz life—a four-decade time span—to writing about his concentrationary imprisonment was Primo Levi (1919-1987), the 100th anniversary of whose birth is celebrated this year. On the occasion of this anniversary, this volume entitled "Literature and Genocide" aims to pay a tribute not only to Primo Levi but also to those millions of people who were imprisoned in hundreds of concentration camps throughout Austria, France, Germany, Poland, the former USSR, and elsewhere. In many cases, their lives were annihilated at one point of their imprisonment. The survivors of the Nazi horror spent the rest of their lives trying to come to terms with themselves. This is the case with well-known figures such as Emily Bruck, Charlotte Delbo, Jorge Semprún and Elie Wiesel. Others failed in their attempt to piece their lives together, and eventually committed suicide: to give three widely known names, Jean Améry,[4] Paul Celan and Primo Levi.[5]

All these survivors—and many others—dedicated their lives to writing about their inferno.[6] One of those witnesses was Primo Levi. His testimony—initiated with the publication of *If this Is a Man/Survival in Auschwitz (Se questo è un uomo,* 1947/1958)—is, in one of his biographers' words, "the life and the oeuvre of one of the great witnesses of our times" (translation mine) – "la vie et l'oeuvre d'un des grands témoins de notre temps" (Mesnard 2011: 11; not translated into English).

Philippe Mesnard recounts that once liberated from the Auschwitz camp, Levi arrived at Katowice. As soon as he met the Russian commander-in-chief, the Italian survivor told him that he and his friend agreed to testify: "it is of paramount importance to inform the whole world about camp violence. And since it is a question of witnessing in order to inform, Leonardo and Primo accept" – "qu'il est de première importance d'informer le monde

[3] Delbo (1995: 233-355; 1971) is especially recommended.

4 In a chapter entitled "Torture" ("Tortur"), Jean Améry, who refers to torture as "the most horrible event a human being can retain within himself" (1980: 22) – "Die Tortur ist das fürchterlichste Ereignis, das ein Mensch in sich bewahren kann" (1977 [1966]: 53) – points out that a prisoner was more scared of dying *(Sterben)* than of death *(Tod)* itself.

5 "The Jewish Holocaust" (Jones 2006: 147-184) offers the non-specialist an excellent overview.

6 Dawidowicz' "Appendix A: The Fate of the Jews in Hitler's Europe: By Country" (1986 [1975]: 357-401) is highly recommended; and Hilberg's "Appendix B: Statistical Recapitulation" (1985 [1961]: 338-339); see also Hilberg (157-259) for an extended explanation of how the Nazi machinery of mass murder operated at different levels, from the Jews' arrival at the camps until their final extermination; and, finally, a chapter entitled "Nazi Antisemitism" in Prager & Telushkin (2016: 136-152).

entier sur la violence des camps. Et parce qu'il s'agit de témoigner pour informer, Leonardo et Primo acceptent" (106).

It did not take de Benedetti and Levi long to start working on a joint project that consisted in writing about the sanitary conditions in the Monowitz camp—a camp inside Auschwitz which held the infamous IG Farben Factory where Primo Levi had worked making synthetic rubber.[7] This was a major event in Levi's life as a witness because this report turned out to be "[the] first piece of writing that bears the question of testimony in it" – "première écriture [qui] porte en soi la question de l'addresse testimoniale" (Mesnard 2011: 107). This essay—entitled *Auschwitz Report* (*Rapporto su Auschwitz*) and published in English in 2006—is defined not only as an "exemplary witness of Nazi concentration camps and of Jewish genocide" but also as "a shared experience" – respectively, "témoin exemplaire des camps de concentration nazi et du génocide des Juifs" and "une expérience partagée" (108).[8]

Having a "shared experience" is crucial because it is the only way to create a continuum between those who went through the concentrationary inferno and those who, not having a direct exposure to it, have wanted to know about how this tragedy occurred in recent European history.[9] As regards the connection between third-generation writers and transmission, Victoria Aarons rightly claims that "'third-generation' suggests both an ongoing chain of necessarily complicated continuity in the transfer of memory from one generation to the next and a context for the affective disruptions of that continuity" (2016: xvi).

In Philippe Mesnard's explanation, "shared writing is a type of collective meditation between the text and the reality such text bears witness of" – "l'écriture commune est une forme de méditation collectif entre le texte et la réalité dont le texte atteste" (2011: 108). This kind of testimony is extremely valuable because it is not only an author's testimony but also the transmission of their testimony. At one point, Mesnard says that, according to Levi, "those who forget or those who do not bear testimony to their children will see their house come down, will see illness affect them, and their children run away from them" – "ce qui oublieraient ou ceux qui ne transmettraient pas à leurs enfants, verront leur

7 Friedländer (2007: 503-504) explains how Levi and his companions, who were arrested by the Fascist militia in December of 1943, ended up in the camps of Monowitz-Buna and Birkenau; for her part, Dawidowicz (1986 [1975]: 121) also offers a brief account of this issue.

8 See *Rapporto sulla organizzazione igienico-sanitaria del Campo di concentramento per Ebrei di Monowitz* (Levi 2016b, I: 1177-1194). This book is not included in *The Complete Works of Primo Levi* (2016a). It can be consulted in Levi & De Benedetti (2006).

9 In his *Trial and Error. The Autobiography* (1949), Chaim Weizman (חיים ויצמן), the prestigious chemist and first President of the State of Israel, alludes to "the bestiality of the extermination chambers" (1949, II, 357), in clear reference to concentration camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau.

maison s'écrouler, la maladie les atteindre, leurs enfants se détourner d'eux" (135). And as regards the importance of passing the message on to others, Victoria Aarons points out that "[s]uch garnered memories are openings for midrashic moments of continuity and extension, an invitation to *carry the weight of memory into the present"* (2012: 139; emphasis mine).

Writing, then, is a powerful psychological resource when it comes to passing one's testimony on to subsequent generations: "Life and writing are closely interrelated" – "Vie, écriture sont très liées" (Mesnard 2011: 143). The connection between writing and living a post-Holocaust life is taken up by the Spanish Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprún, who chose French as the language through which he would give testimony. Semprún's approach is radically different to Levi's. For instance, in *Literature or Life* (1997) – *L'écriture ou la vie* (1994) – he includes a chapter entitled "The Day of Primo Levi's Death" (1997: 223-251) – "Le jour de la mort de Primo Levi" (1994: 289-323) – where he addresses the writing process of the former Auschwitz inmate, whose suicide took place in April of 1987. Semprún associates this tragic event with the same month—of 1945, however. This was the time when the Buchenwald camp was liberated by the Sixth Armored Division of the US Army. Semprún defines Levi's work(s) as the "appointment of memory and death" (1997: 225) – "rendez-vous de la mémoire et de la mort" (1994: 292). Also in this chapter, the Spanish Buchenwald ex-prisoner, who ponders his own writing process, defines it as "the strategy of forgetting" (1997: 230) – "la stratégie de l'oubli" (1994: 297). What he means is that he needed to forget in order to be able to live; the alternative to this—he thinks—was conducive to Levi's tragic end: remembering to die. Semprún concludes his line of reasoning saying that he did not read any Holocaust-related testimony until 1963, when he read Levi's *The Truce* (*La tregua,* 1963). In his own explanation, he had avoided this kind of documents as a "strategy of survival" (1997: 237) – "stratégie de la survie" (1994: 305). In *Kaddish for a Child Not Born* (*Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekërt,* 1990), the novelist of Hungarian extraction Imre Kertész establishes a devastating interrelation between memory, writing and death by saying that "the pen is my spade" (1997: 24) – "a golyóstoll az én ásóm" (1990: 51-52).

Jorge Semprún and Elie Wiesel approach the issue of writing vs. life in *Se taire est impossible* (*To Remain Silent Is Impossible,* 1995; not translated into English[10]), published on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps in

10 There is a German edition of this work entitled *Schweigen ist unmöglich* (1997).

Germany and in Poland. Semprún and Wiesel met in the French radio programme "Entretien" – "Interview" – to talk about their concentrationary experience.[11]

At one point of their dialogue, Wiesel tells his friend that he believes Levi committed suicide "because he was a writer" (translation mine) – "parce qu'il était écrivain" (1995: 17). Both Wiesel, whose well-known *Night* (*Nuit*) was published thirteen years after his liberation from Auschwitz, and Semprún, whose Holocaust-based novel *The Long Voyage* (*Le grand voyage*) came out eighteen years after his being released from Buchenwald, had to forget in order to be able to remember through writing. Semprún claims, "the more I write, the more I remember" – "plus j'écris, plus la mémoire me revient" (1995: 18) – and "the more I write, the more present memory is, but the more anguish comes back, too, needless to say" – "plus j'écris, plus la mémoire est là, mais plus l'angoisse revient aussi, bien entendu" (19). The Spanish survivor had reflected on the interrelation between writing and memory in his 1964 *The Long Voyage* – originally published as *Le grand vogage* one year before: "Now is not the time for me to tell about this voyage; I have to wait a while, I have to forget this voyage, then later perhaps I'll be able to tell about it" (1964: 129) – "Ce n'est pas encore maintenant que je pourrai raconter ce voyage, it faut attendre encore, il faut vraiment oublier ce voyage, après, peut-être, pourrai-je le raconter" (1963: 153).

Another former Holocaust prisoner who also refers to memory as a dangerous resource is Aharon Appelfeld: "Memory becomes our enemy. We worked on it in every moment in order to weaken it, to distract it, to numb it as you do with pain" (translation mine) – "La mémoire devint notre ennemi. C'est à chaque instant qu'on travailla à l'émousser, à la détourner, à l'engourdir comme on le fait avec la douleur" (Mesnard 2011: 131). In a well-known interview included in Philip Roth's *Shop Talk: A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work* (2001), Appelfeld explains to Roth why, unlike a survivor writer like Primo Levi, he fictionalizes his own experiences. He claims that "[t]o write things as they happened means to enslave oneself to memory, which is only a minor element in the creative process" (27). This could help us better understand why he said in a New Yorker interview published on January 5th, 2018—i.e. the day after he passed away, "I always felt that fiction was the way to the deepest truths"[12] (Gourevitch 2018). (It is probably for the

11 The term "concentrationary universe" was adopted after the publication of *L'univers concentrationnaire* (1947) by the French journalist and writer David Rousset. This is a seminal book translated into English by Ramon Guthrie as *The Other Kingdom* (1947). In 1951 the book, translated by Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse, was entitled *A World Apart.*

12 Bernard Malamud's biographer Philip Davis explains that the way to "do justice to Malamud" is to study his fiction because "[i]t was fiction that provided the best *context* for human understanding" (2007: x; emphasis in original). In my view, this also applies to Appelfeld.

reason given above—to forget in order to remember later—that, as explained in *To Remain Silent Is Impossible,* many survivor-writers like Jean Améry, Paul Celan and Primo Levi, "unable" to forget, ended up committing suicide.)

It seems then that bearing witness—which can be summed up in the first part of Billy Rose's "Remember, forget"—inevitably forces the survivor-witness to sail between the Scylla of remembering and the Charybdis of forgetting.[13] One of these survivor-witnesses is the French partisan Charlotte Delbo, who explores the theme of memory and testimony at the end of her first volume *None of Us Will Return* (*Aucun de nous ne reviendra,* 1970) included in *Auschwitz and After* (*Auschwitz et après*): "Why did I keep my memory? Why this injustice?" (1995: 111) – "Pourquoi ai-je gardé la mémoire? Pourquoi cette injustice?" (1970a: 177, 178, 179). However, in the second volume of her trilogy—*A Useless Knowledge* (*Une connaissance inutile,* 1970)—Delbo, who underscores the importance of remembering, is scared of losing her memory during her post-Auschwitz life. According to her, "[t]o lose one's memory is to lose oneself, to no longer be oneself" (1995: 188) – "[p]erdre la mémoire, c'est se perdre soi-même, c'est n'être plus soi" (1970b: 121). In four verses, she insists on the relevance of writing about the Nazi horror: "I came back from the dead / and believed / this gave me the right / to speak to others" (1995: 228) – "Je suis revenue d'entre les morts / et j'ai cru / que cela me donnait le droit / de parler aux autres" (1970b: 184).

There are others like Ernst Wiechert, however, who from the very beginning had a keen interest in remembering everything—and "record[ing]" it in a Dubnowian fashion. In his classic *Forest of the Dead* (*Der Totenwald. Ein Bericht,* 1946), this Catholic writer and Buchenwald survivor introduces an inmate called Johannes who considers himself a witness ("Zeugnis") who "did not want to overlook or to forget a single detail" (1947: 62) – "wollte nichts übersehen und nichts vergessen" (1977 [1946]: 64). Remembering everything and not overlooking anything is, without a doubt, an extremely painful, lifelong task that not every single survivor could accomplish successfully. One of those who succeeded in bearing witness—although this was a most complicated thing to do—was Edith Bruck.

Edith Bruck is an Auschwitz ex-prisoner of Hungarian extraction who, like Semprún, gave up her mother tongue when bearing testimony. In her case, she writes in Italian as in *Mrs. Auschwitz. The Gift of Speech* (*Signora Auschwitz. Il dono della parola,* 2014 [1999]; not

13 When Victoria Aarons analyzes third-generation narratives, she explains that they "create sites of the imagination, imaginative spaces within which are balanced the antinomies of proximity and distance symptomatic of the ambivalence between forgetting/relinquishing, on the one hand, and remembering/retaining and finally transmitting memory, on the other" (Aarons 2016: xviii).

translated into English[14]). Almost at the end of her narrative, Bruck explains that she sees a psychiatrist who asks her, among other questions, whether she is working. She replies: "I am writing a book about the weight of testimony and about the cage of my experience, about the burden and the sense of guilt it provokes in me" (translation mine) – "sto scrivendo un libro sul peso della testimonianza e della gabbia del mio vissuto, della fatica e del senso di colpa che mi procura" (Bruck 2014 [1999]: 87). And in connection with testimony, she openly says to the psychiatrist that she has felt for years that it was a must-do task: "my testimony was an irreplaceable good thing, speaking my mind about Auschwitz" – "era un bene insostituibile la mia testimonianza, il mio parlare di Auschwitz" (16).

Like Edith Bruck, Elie Wiesel talks about the painful task of passing down the experience of the Nazi horror. At the beginning of the preface to the new edition of his classic *Night* (*Nuit*), he says that "[i]f in my lifetime I was to write only one book, this would be the one" (Wiesel 2006 [1958]: vii) – "Si de ma vie je n'avais eu à écrire qu'un seul libre, ce serait celui-ci" (Wiesel 2007 [1958]: 9). A few paragraphs below, he claims that since History will be judged one day, "I knew that I must bear witness" (viii) – "je devais témoigner pour ses victimes" (11). In this sense, like other survivors, he alludes to the difficulty of verbalizing the Nazi inferno: "But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and perverted by the enemy?" (ix) – "Trahie, corrompue, pervertie par l'ennemi, comment pouvait-on réhabiliter et humaniser la parole?" (12).

Rehabilitating speech is a major challenge which becomes not only Wiesel's priority but also that of many other survivor-writers. He considers himself a person who "has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory" (2006 [1958]: viii) – "moralement et humainement obligé d'empêcher l'ennemi de remporter une victorire posthume, sa dernière, en effaçant ses crimes de la mémoire des hommes" (2007 [1958]: 10).

Primo Levi and Edith Bruck, to give just two examples, are committed to the idea of struggling against forgetting. Apart from their writing, they embarked on a three-decade-plus project consisting in visiting primary and high schools to talk about their concentrationary life. By the mid-1970s, however, Levi had begun to feel that students had lost their interest in this issue. After this period, he started to write fictional stories about the Holocaust. This is what he said about his new approach to writing: "One can make things up as long as the values of the world depicted are not betrayed" (translation mine)

14 A French edition of this work – *Signora Auschwitz: Le don de la parole (Entre histoire et mémoire)* – was published in 2015.


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– "On peut inventer à condition de ne pas trahir les valeurs du monde dont on parle" (Mesnard 2011: 397) – because "one also runs the risk of betrayal if transmission is done in a clumsy manner" – "transmettre maladroitement comporte également le risque d'une trahison" (397). (I wonder what Levi would have thought of the way a number of third-generation writers such as Shalom Auslander bear witness.)

Like Levi, Emily Bruck also delivered Holocaust-oriented talks in high schools for a number of years. She firmly believes that new generations should be the 'target audience' of their message. Like the Italian survivor, she insists on the importance of the survivor's testimony: "My own direct testimony would be a lesson for them that no school could offer" (translation mine) – "La diretta testimonianza del mio vissuto sarebbe stata per loro una lezione che nessuna scuola poteva dare!" (Bruck 2014 [1999]: 17). However, also like Levi, she had realized by the early 1980s that the Holocaust was not a 'hot topic' any longer. For this reason, in spite of the endless invitations she continued to receive for years, her ever-increasing disappointment with how frivolously her message was received eventually led her to discontinue her school visits.

Levi's and Bruck's focus on transmission—as in the case of other survivors—is solidly grounded in two ideas: on the one hand, if people ignore their past, history will repeat itself; on the other, forgetting is also conducive to another danger: negationism.[15] As is well known, negationism began to be more visible in the mid and late 1970s. Hence, the 'never forget' mission should carry on.[16]

II.

As in the case of the Holocaust, it would be unthinkable to exclude Gulag-based literature from a monograph about literature and genocide such as the present issue. The GULAG (ГУЛАГ)—also written "Gulag"—referring to the most devastating extermination weapon used by communism, is an acronym "meaning *Glavnoe upravlenie Lagerei [Главное управление лагерей],* or Main Camp Administration" (Applebaum 2003: 3). It "has also come to signify not only the administration of the concentration camps but also the system of Soviet slave labour itself, in all its forms and varieties: labour camps, punishment

15 For an account of this issue, consult, for instance, Dawidowicz (1986 [1975]: xxiii-xxiv) and Volkman (1982: 81-92). Lipstadt (1993), a book-length analysis of Holocaust negationism, is especially recommended.

16 Hilberg (1985 [1961]: 263-305) offers an in-depth study of the "nature of the process"—"perpetrators" (263-293) and "the victims" (293-305); in "Explaining the Holocaust: Does Social Psychology Exonerate the Perpetrators?" Miller, Buddie and Kretschmar (in Newman & Erber 2002: 301-324) explore the impact that social-psychological explanations may have on those people who read them; for an approach to "revisionism" as a step prior to "negationism," see Tertsch's "Revisionism, Or the Worst Symptom" – "El revisionismo o el peor síntoma" (1993: 103-108; originally written, and only published, in Spanish).

camps, criminal and political camps, women's camps, children's camps, transit camps" (3). Anne Applebaum concludes that

> *Even more broadly, 'Gulag' has come to mean the Soviet repressive system itself, the set of procedures that prisoners once called the 'meat-grinder': the arrests, the interrogations, the transport in unheated cattle cars, the forced labour, the destruction of families, the years spent in exile, the early and unnecessary deaths.* (3)

The birth of the Gulag camps dates back from 1918 (Solzhenitsyn 2007: 196; 1975, II: 17) –(1987, III: 17). As explained in "The Fingers of Aurora" ("Персты Авроры"), the term "concentration camp" (2007: 197; 1975, II: 17) – "концлагерь" (1987, III: 17-18) – was first included in a telegramme written by Lenin, dated August, 1918. Or as pointed out by Joseph Pearce, one of Solzhenitsyn's biographers, "the camps originated and the Archipelago was born from this particular instruction of July 23, 1918" (2011: 2). This makes reference to legislation passed by the Bolshevik government "which stipulated that 'those deprived of freedom who are capable of labour must be recruited for physical work on a compulsory basis'" (2). (It should not be ignored that Hitler's concentration camps – *Konzentrationslager* – started to be conceived in March of 1933, and were modeled on the Gulag labor camps. The Nazis also talked about the British concentration camps in South Africa during the Boer War.)

When addressing the issue of communism, Jorge Semprún, a Buchenwald survivor and a former member of the Spanish Communist Party—The "Partido Comunista de España" better known in Spain by its acronym PCE—describes it as "the murderous illusion of the Communist adventure" (1997: 258) – "l'illusion meurtrière de l'aventure communiste" (1994: 332) – conducive to the "bloodiest failure, the most unfathomable and abject social injustice of History" (258) – "plus sanglant échec, à l'injustice sociale la plus abjecte et opaque de l'Histoire" (332).[17] We should add that lying is a natural weapon especially used by dictators to stay in power for as long as they can. Jean-François Revel analyzes this theme in "On Simple Lies" – "Du mensonge simple" – included in *The Flight from Truth: The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information* (1991) – *La Connaisance inutile* (1988). As the author claims, lies in a scientific community are soon found out. However, in a totalitarian regime like that of the USSR, it is no wonder that Lysenkoism—Lysenko's biolological theory (1935-1964)—was successful for decades. In Revel's explanation, it was

> *imposed on the entire Soviet Union by its totalitarian regime. But Lysenko never enjoyed the slightest credit in international scientific circles. Lysenko, who rejected*

17 For an in-depth study of Marxism-Leninism-Stalism, consult Escohotado (2016, III); and for an extended analysis of communism, see "Leftist Antisemitism" in Prager & Telushkin (2016: 122-135).

> *the chromosome theory, who denied the existence of genes, and who stigmatized in grotesque terms the "Fascist and Trotskyist-Bukharinist deviation of genetics," owed the local hegemony of his crazy biology less to his cleverness as an imposter than to the political volition of Stalin and Khrushchev* (1991: 20).[18]

In line with the rest of his *Flight from Truth,* one of Revel's main theses here is that for thirty years the vast majority of the Russian population, unable to have access to scientific information outside the former USSR, was forced to live the dream of someone like Stalin (Сталин), a visionary supported by a totalitarian state.[19]

Another critic of communism is the historian Richard Pipes, who explains in his 2001 book-length study that millions of people were deported to Soviet labor camps, and how these camps became actual extermination centers like those used by the Nazis.

> *The kulaks—the term covered better-off peasants as well as those who actively resisted collectivization—had all their belongings confiscated and were deported either to hard-labor camps or, along with their families, into Siberian exile. According to official records, in 1930 and 1931, 1,903,392 people suffered one or the other, of these punishments.* (Pipes 2001: 60)[20]

For her part, Anne Applebaum (2003: 268) refers to the so-called 'Great Terror' (1937-1938),[21] the years when the major mass arrests took place. From a quantitative point of view, this period is only comparable to that of 1948-1949.[22]

Nineteen thirty-seven was a watershed year in the history of the Gulag administration system because

> *it was in this year that the Soviet camps temporarily transformed themselves from indifferently managed prisons in which people died by accident, into genuinely deadly camps where prisoners were deliberately worked to death, or actually murdered, in far larger numbers than they had been in the past.* (Applebaum 2003: 104)

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18 "qui fut imposée par un État totalitaire à tout un pays comme doctrine officielle. Mais le lyssenkisme ne jouit jamais du moindre crédit dans les milieux scientifiques internationaux. Lyssenko, qui repoussait la théorie chromosomique, niait l'existence des gènes et flétrissait en termes bouffons la «déviation fasciste et trostkiste-boukhariniste de la génétique», dut l'hégémonie locale de sa biologie délirante moins à son habilité comme imposteur qu'à la volonté politique de Staline et de Khrouchtchev" (Revel 1988: 32-33).

19 See, for instance, "On Simple Lies" (Revel 1991: 19-29) – "Du mensonge simple" (Revel 1988: 31-44) – for a more detailed analysis of the role of lies in totalitarian systems such as communism and nazism; for a brief account of communism as a failed system, see Tertsch (1993), especially "The Big Scam" – "La gran estafa" (29-33) – and "Intellectuals and Hell" – "Los intelectuales y el infierno" (35-40); see also Tertsch's "Bad Neighbors" – "Malos vecinos" (53-58) – for an explanation about Poland under the Nazi and Communist yoke.

20 For an extended account of how prisoners were transported to Gulag prisons in freight cars, much the same as victims of the Nazis, see Applebaum's "Transport, Arrival, Selection" (2003: 158-178); for an explanation about mass deportations from Poland and the Baltic states, among others, consult also Applebaum (2012: 99-102).

21 Pearce (2011: 30-31) also addresses this period.

22 In "Appendix: How Many" (2003: 515-522), Applebaum offers detailed estimates about the number of the arrested, imprisoned and exiled during the Gulag years.

Unlike Nazi camps, Soviet camps continued to grow throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. They began to be dismantled in 1956, three years after Stalin's death. Stalin believed that labor camps were a key element in the USSR's economic development.[23] His successors, however, acknowledged that not only was Stalin's view wrong but also that the hundreds of camps scattered throughout the former USSR had actually contributed to the eventual impoverishment of the Soviet economy. The disolution or closure of these camps—converted into prisons in the 1970s and 1980s—began to be a reality in 1987 under the Presidency of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev (Михаи́л Серге́евич Горбачёв ), whose grandparents had been Gulag prisoners. The closure of the vast majority of camps took place with the collapse of the Soviet Union in December of 1991.[24] However, there are still labor camps in Russia.

As Gorbachev's government, which played a significant role in the attempt to tell the truth about the sinister decades of Gulag-based dictatorship, triggered the glasnost / perestroika (Гласность / перестройка) policy, archives began to be opened in order to discover what had actually happened and

> *Memorial was founded by a group of young historians, some of whom had been collecting oral histories of camp survivors for many years. Among them was Arseny [Borisovich] Roginsky [Арсе́ний (Бори́сович) Рогинский], founder of the journal Pamyat ([Па́мять] Memory), which first began to appear in samizdat [самиздат], and then in emigration, as early as the 1970s.* (Applebaum 2003: 497)

Although historians like Applebaum had not gone through the Gulag, they started to bear witness to truth as soon as they could. Their contribution to the disclosure of what had occurred in those prisons for decades has been crucial.

If central to the discovery of Gulag-oriented truth has been the role played by historians like Anne Aplebaum and Richard Pipes, among others, the inferno-like experience gone through in Soviet extermination camps[25] and described in countless memoirs, novels, tales and poems has also been essential, as in the case of the Holocaust. Alexander Isayevich

23 "Stalin's terror" in Jones (2006: 124-146) offers the non-specialist reader an excellent overview of these years.

24 See Applebaum (2012: 351) for an explanation of the *"Homo Sovieticus"*—an ironic phrase used in reference to those who would never oppose communism. The "homo sovieticus" became a key actor in the survival of communism throughout Europe for decades; for a more extended account of the *homo sovieticus* vs. *homo religiosus* in Solzhenitsyn, consult also Ericson (1993: 25-34).

25 Toker explains that "the Kolyma forced labor camps turned into camps of slow (and frequently accelerated) extermination" (2000: 145).

Solzhenitsyn – Алекса́ндр Иса́евич Солжени́цын – is at the core of Gulag writers.[26] The impact—and influence—of his writing is difficult to overrate, as can be deduced from the opening lines of Edward E. Ericson's introduction to the abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago* (*Архипела́г ГУЛА́Г,* 1973):

> *For a few decades the word Holocaust has served us well as a shorthand term for modern man's inhumanity to man. In recent years a second such shorthand term has entered our vocabulary thinking: Gulag. This term comes to us not from a host of witnesses but from one lone man: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose very name has become a household word around the world.* (Ericson 2007: xi)[27]

And when Ericson talks about one of Solzhenitsyn's greatest contributions, he explicitly says that it "has [undoubtedly] been to write this history of the concentration camps of the Soviet Union" (xii). More specifically, the reason why Solzhenitsyn chose the name Archipelago to describe the Soviet concentrations camp system is explained in Anne Applebaum's 2003 book-length study about the Gulag: "Solovetsky, the first Soviet camp to be planned and built with any expectation of permanence, developed on a genuine archipelago, spreading outwards island by island, taking over the old churches and buildings of an ancient monastic community as it grew" (41).[28]

If, as explained in the previous section, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Primo Levi's birth in 2019 this volume intends to pay a tribute to Holocaust ex-prisoners like him, we should not disregard that the year 2018, at the beginning of which I started to prepare the present special issue, marked the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, one of the most devastating 20th century massacres—and therefore in the history of humankind. The very same year marked the 100th anniversary of Solzhenitsyn's birth, and the 10th anniversary of his death. 2018 was also the 110th anniversary of the birth of Georgy Demidov (Гео́ргий Деми́дов ), another Gulag survivor-writer, whose little analyzed works are examined by Leona Toker in one of the essays of the present issue.

26 See Toker (2000: 28-72) for a study of the 70-year-plus literary corpus of the memoir literature about the Gulag. Apart from well-known literary figures such as Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov (Варлам Тихонович Шаламов), other first-rate memoirists are also analyzed: among others, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Alexander Dolgun, Evgenia Solomonovna Ginzburg (Евгения Соломоновна Гинзбург), Gustav Herling-Hrudzinski (Gustaw Herling-Grudziński), Elinor Lipper, Julius Borisovich Margolin (Юлий Борисович Марголин), Ekaterina Olitskaya (Екатерина Олицкая), Dimitry Panin (Дмитрий Па́нин) and Joseph Scholmer.

27 See also Ericson (1993: 11).

28 For further information about the Solovetsky concentration camp—the first Soviet camp of an endless series—see especially Solzhenitsyn's "Part II – Perpetual Motion": "The Ships of the Archipelago," "The Ports of the Archipelago," "The Slave Caravans" and "From Island to Island" (2007: 149-174; 1975, I: 489-615) – "ЧАСТЬ ВТОРАЯ – ВЕЧНОЕ ДВИЖЕНИЕ": "Корабли Архипелага," "Порты Архипелага," "Караваны невольников," "С острова на остров" (1987, I: 469-579); consult also Applebaum (2003: 40-58); and Toker (2000: 14-17).

Therefore, it seems an appropriate time to pay homage to the memory of Gulag ex-prisoners through a commemorative publication like this monograph.

It is true that Gulag writers like Solzhenitsyn wrote numerous works of Gulag fiction. However, as he explains in the "Author's Note" included in the English abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago:*

> *In this book there are no fictitious persons, nor fictitious events. People and places are named with their own names. If they are identified by initials instead of names, it is for personal considerations. If they are not named at all, it is only because human memory has failed to preserve their names. But it all took place just as it is here described.* (Ericson 2007: xvii)

For this reason, the book's subtitle is *An Experiment in Literary Investigation – Опыт художественного исследования. Gulag Archipelago* is "not a novel; it is a work of historical reconstruction" (Ericson 2007: xii). It is recommended reading to "[t]hose who wish to understand the underlying causes of the collapse of Soviet Communism" (Ericson 1993: 11). Solzhenitsyn was fully aware of his role as a witness to the extent of considering himself "the chronicler of the archipelago" (2007: 451)[29] – "летописцем Архипелага" (1987, VII: 469). According to Leona Toker, "the first major ethical aim of *The Gulag Archipelago* is to speak for the silent victims" (2000: 106). Joseph Pearce explains that, while imprisoned, Solzhenitsyn memorized, like many other camp inmates, as much as he could of what he had composed because putting it in writing was an extremely dangerous thing to do. Solzhenitsyn's biographer says that "[b]y the time he was released, he had consigned twelve thousand lines of his own work to memory" (2011: 133). The prisoners' superlative endeavor—epitomized in Solzhenitsyn's work—leads us back to the major theme of this issue: history, memory and transmission.

In effect, as in the case of Holocaust writing, history, memory and transmission are at the core of Gulag writing.[30] Towards the end of his monumental *Gulag Archipelago,* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn refers to the impact his first book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich – Оди́н день Ива́на Дени́совича* (1962) – had inside and outside the former Soviet Union. In

29 Jiménez Losantos (2018: 514-515) includes a number of extracts on how Solzhenitsyn saw Spain in 1976, immediately after Franco's death; Jiménez Losantos (515-517) also gives an account of what a number of Spanish writers and intellectuals such as Juan Benet, Camilo José Cela and Francisco Umbral, among others, said about the Literature Nobel Prize laureate (1970); Stanley G. Payne (2017: 250) explicitly notes that approximately four months after Franco's death, Solzhenitsyn visited Spain and claimed that, except from a political viewpoint, he saw a quite free country; Pearce (2011: 246-247) also gives an account of what Solzhenitsyn said about mid-70s Spain and what international newspapers like *Le Monde* wrote about him.

30 Applebaum establishes a most appropriate comparison between Auschwitz and the Kolyma gold mine-based camp: "In the same way that Auschwitz has become, in popular memory, the camp which symbolizes all other Nazi camps, so too has the word 'Kolyma' come to signify the greatest hardships of the Gulag" (2003: 96).

particular, when he talks about how a book like *One Day* was received by other "zeks" – "зэ́к," an abbreviation of "zaklyuchennyi" ("заключённый") is the Russian word for "prisoner" – Solzhenitsyn explains that "[f]or them, for today's zeks, my book is no book, my truth is no truth unless there is a continuation, unless I go on to speak of them, too. Truth must be told—and things must change!" (2007: 453; 1975, III: 478).[31] Almost at the end of his Solzhenitsyn biography, Joseph Pearce points out that "[i]n October 2010, it was announced that *The Gulag Archipelago* would become required reading for all Russian high school students. In a meeting with Solzhenitsyn's widow, Putin [Пу́тин] described *The Gulag Archipelago* as 'essential reading'" (2011: 378)—in order to know the truth, I would add.[32]

The interrelation between testimony and truth has been addressed by Leona Toker, who unambiguously says that "the teleological explanations for the need of Gulag memoirs and other testimony to atrocities do not suffice" because "[t]he history of the rise and fall of the Soviet regime and its culture suggests… that the ancient principle of valuing the truth for its own sake cannot be sacrified with impunity" (2000: 248; ellipsis mine).[33] At the outset of her *Return from the Archipelago,* she refers to the fact that "[f]amiliarity with survivor memoirs partly reduces or compensates for these insults to the memory of the dead" (5).

As explained above, Solzhenitsyn is a major Gulag memoirist. Another key figure is Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov (Варла́м Ти́хонович Шала́мов), whose approach to memoir writing is, however, different from Solzhenitsyn's. This is mainly due to the fact that his writing is far less dependent on fiction than Shalamov's, who has been aptly described as "a subtly philosophical artist whose short stories erase the borderlines between historical testimony and an imaginative construction of the past and provide an example par excellence of narratives as bifunctional objects" (Toker 2000: 9). Like Primo Levi and

31 In connection with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* Applebaum refers to Gorbachev's policies of glasnost ('openness') and perestroika ('restructuring'). She explains that early in Gorbachev's role as Soviet leader—but as late as January of 1987 in the history of the USSR—"the Soviet public had the chance to read Osip Mandelstam (Осип Мандельштам) and Joseph Brodsky (Ио́сиф Бро́дский), Anna Akhmatova's (Анна Ахматова) *Requiem (Реквием*), Boris Pasternak's (Бори́с Пастерна́к ) *Doctor Zhivago* (*До́ктор Жива́го* ), even Vladimir Nabokov's (Влади́мир Набо́ков) *Lolita.* After a struggle, *Novyi Mir* (*Но́вый Ми́р* ), now under new editorship, began publishing instalments of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago. One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* would soon sell millions of copies, and authors whose works had previously circulated only in samizdat [underground self-publication], if at all, sold hundreds of thousand of copies of their Gulag memoirs too" (2003: 496).

32 Interestingly, Ericson points out that "[t]he primary intended audience of his literature is future generations of Russians" (1993: 5).

33 Consult, for example, Pearce (2011: 167-182) for an account of how Solzhenitsyn had to hide from KGB agents works like *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, In the First Circle* (*В кру́ге пе́рвом*) *and The Gulag Archipelago.*

Edith Bruck, among others, Shalamov, whose "life was devoted to remembering and writing" (147), devoted the last decades of his existence to bearing witness. In his case, that time span ranges from his release from Kolyma in the early 1950s until he passed away in 1982. During those three decades his health worsened to the extent that, after leaving the infamous gold mines, "[t]he body of a Kolyma survivor bore witness of its own: blindness, deafness, frostbitten skin, Ménière disease, chronic congestion, and apparently also minor strokes, angina pectoris, Parkinson's disease, and incipient dementia" (149).[34]

Holocaust and Gulag survivors bore testimony of their inferno-like experience for decades. However, unlike what happens with the Shoah (שׁ ואה), in the case of the Gulag extermination camps, "very few people in contemporary Russia feel the past to be a burden, or an obligation, at all. The past is a bad dream to be forgotten, or a whispered rumour to be ignored" (Applebaum 2003: 512). And she concludes that "if we forget the Gulag, sooner or later we will find it hard to understand our own history too" (513). As George (Jorge) Santayana put it more than a century ago, "[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (2011: 172).

III.

The present special issue includes four essays: first, Cheryl Chaffin's "Auschwitz as University: Primo Levi's Poetry and Fiction Post-Deportation and Return" focuses, on the one hand, on what knowledge the Italian survivor took from the camps that he developed over the four remaining decades of his life; and, on the other, how those insights manifested in his writing. Specifically, her study addresses relationships in Levi's work and his knowledge and observation of intimacy and conflict in—and after—the war.

Aimee Pozorski's "Figuration and the Child in the Age of Genocide" explores the ways in which the paradoxical figure of an unborn child depicts the social, political, and private horrors of genocide. By proposing that we are connected via that which we cannot understand, this essay examines the "Child Not Born" in Imre Kertész's *Kaddish for a Child Not Born (Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért,* 1990), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Anna Winger's *This Must be Be the Place* (2008).

Gustavo Sánchez Canales's "An Approach to 21st Century Literary Representations of the Holocaust" looks at two novels by two third-generation writers who approach the Holocaust in a different manner: First, he will examine Holocaust-related imagery in Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution* (2004), a novella which addresses the sequels of the

34 For a detailed explanation of the Kolyma mines, see Shalamov's tales and Applebaum (2003: 96-102). Applebaum specifically addresses how the Kolyma region held the homonymous camp, its origins, development and expansion.

concentration camp horror through the traumatic experience of a 9-year-old survivor. The other novel is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), a story narrated from two points of view—one comic, one serious—which seems to be Foer's way to show whether these two views are reconcilable or not.

Finally, Leona Toker's "Literary Reflections of Elitocide: Georgy Demidov and Precursors" is devoted to literary representations of the killing of the educated or of the leadership of an ethnic group. Many of these reflections can be recognized as such only after the phenomenon itself has crystallized in collective memory. Literary treatments of the issue of elitocide included in this essay are works by Fedor Dostoevsky (*The Devils [Бесы],* 1871–1872), H. G. Wells (*The Time Machine,* 1895), and Vladimir Nabokov (*Bend Sinister,* 1947). The main example, however, is the theme of the destruction of the most talented in the Gulag stories by Georgy Demidov, a labor camp survivor whose works have been little studied.

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